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# Streeterville thorium clean up continues

By Tom McPherson  
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The Teachers Retirement System of the State of Illinois, owners of a parking lot at 341 E. Ohio St., are moving forward with an environmental clean up of their property in anticipation of sale and development. The property is contaminated with the carcinogen, thorium.

The clean up, related to the Lindsay Light Co. gas lamp plant which operated in Streeterville through the 1930s, is one of many ongoing thorium clean ups in the area of south Streeterville primarily located along Grand Avenue and Illinois Street east of Michigan Avenue. So far MCL Development has cleaned up a site at St. Clair Street and Grand Avenue, and Chin

Development has cleaned up a site immediately east (but now has stopped development due to financial problems).

Thorium is a carcinogen that has been linked to cancer clusters elsewhere in the Chicago area and nationwide. It was used during the Manhattan Project during World War II to produce the uranium that fueled the atom bomb. In Streeterville, Lindsay

used thorium to make their gas lamps glow brightly.

Thorium contaminated soil can be capped with asphalt or concrete with to keep it safe, and out of the air we breath, but once a site is developed, it can become airborne and must be cleaned. Derrick Kimbrough, community involvement coordinator with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said that the teacher's union was working hard to complete the clean up of the property in an appropriate manner.

The parking lot, located just east of the Time-Life building, was initially detected as contaminated by the EPA "scan van" in June of 2000. In March of this year, Kimbrough said the EPA received permission from the property owners of the last remaining Lindsay Light building, on St. Clair Street and Grand Avenue. The results of this test are still being analyzed, but the building is largely felt to be another likely contamination point in the community.

Currently there are two other known thorium contaminations in Streeterville, the parking lot east of McClurg Court and Grand Avenue, and the peninsula of land that will be DuSable Park east of Lake Shore Drive between Ogden Slip, and the Chicago River.

"There are a number of

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properties in the area that have been tested," Kimbrough said.

The U.S. EPA also found the possible contamination of a third property at 319 E. Illinois St., owned by HBE Corp. This property is currently slated to be developed into a convention hotel, but the soil will first have to be tested for thorium, and possibly cleaned up, when the asphalt is removed.

Last week, the teacher's union held its first community meeting with local Streeterville residents to discuss the coming clean up work. Kimbrough said that the group was not obligated to be so forthright about their work.

"This is something that they wanted to do so when they started the work there wouldn't be any questions," Kimbrough said. "In their effort to do this they wanted to follow all the [public hearing] requirements that we [the U.S. EPA] do."

Even as these properties and cleaned up, which entails wetting the dirt to control dust, digging it up and trucking it off to a containment site in Utah, Streeterville's marriage to thorium will likely never be over. The thorium contamination extends throughout this area under the sidewalks and streets, which won't be cleaned up, just capped. Each time a contractor, utility worker or private party applies for a city permit to dig up a sidewalk or street, they'll have to follow special precautions to control the creation of dust which can carry thorium and be inhaled.

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## Streeterville says hotel is off the Mark

By Sean Cermak  
STAFF WRITER

The proposed development of a 1,600-room, 43-story convention hotel, Adams Mark, at 319 E. Illinois St., is close to earning building permits for the south Streeterville site, but local residents have initiated a full scale protest to stop construction by any means they can.

The new hotel was approved through a 1998 amendment of the Planned Development for the site including the nearby MCL River East development. The city has already signed off on any design review it had on the proposal, and there are just a few steps before the developer can earn building permits.

But a picket rally held at Ogden Plaza on Illinois Street and Columbus Drive on Saturday, June 23, attracted 50 people who spoke out saying that the hotel just can't be allowed to be built. The rally was sponsored by the Streeterville Organization of

Active Residents, which usually reserves its input to boardrooms and well organized and attended public hearings. The group hasn't taken it to the streets since it fought and won a protest of a proposed change to the John Hancock Center about a decade ago.

Residents of south Streeterville can't live with another convention hotel, across the street from the Sheraton, said Rosalind Hecim, president of SOAR. Hecim spearheaded the opposition to Adams Mark along with SOAR's real estate chair Betty Eaton.

Eaton said that SOAR has long been trying to work on this issue through traditional means, but those efforts failed.

"Two years ago, SOAR first contacted Adam's Mark executives," Eaton said at last week's rally. "We hoped then to discuss how their plans could be shaped to match community needs. After many delays, their response was,

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Nancy Simon, a resident of East Ontario Street, asks a question during SOAR's program "What's Going Up on The River?" held last week at the American Dental Association auditorium. The panelists included Rosalind Hecim, SOAR president; Betty Eaton, SOAR real estate committee representative, and Charles Landefeld, vice-president of MCL Companies.

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'We don't need to meet with you, we're within our zoning rights and the city has approved our plans.'

"This is not the end. It's not done until it's done," Eaton said. "If necessary, we will continue fighting until the bulldozers arrive in the parking lot across the street."

SOAR's primary concern is with traffic. Streeterville has 25,000 residential units in place or under way in the immediate area, and Navy Pier's runaway success outstripped predictions. Construction in Streeterville continues with development of River East with a hotel and condo tower, a 34-screen theater complex and restaurants.

"If this is going to be a 24-hour convention hotel there will be tour buses, semi-trucks and taxis, as well as cars," Hecim said. "Can you imagine what will happen when another hotel whose entrance is right across the street has a convention and both facilities have vehicles trying to unload and load? You don't need traf-

fic studies, you just have to look at the realities of what's proposed to go on this site, what's already there and what will open in the next two years to come to only one conclusion; it just can't work."

John Benton, 505 N. Lake Shore Drive, said that he's lived in south Streeterville for 11 years, and development is starting to erode the quality of life that brought him there.

"We are having trouble getting to our homes," said Benton, who also attended and spoke at the rally. "What used to be a 10 minute ride from Orleans Street is now 20-30 minutes. At peak times it can be up to 45 minutes to go these few blocks. I see frustrated traffic police with their hands on their hips because there is no place to move the traffic. This is all before the current projects are completed on Illinois and Grand."

Currently, development of the hotel is delayed only by the developer's efforts to put together financing. Adams Mark could not be reached for comment on the story. SOAR officials promise that the rally was just the beginning of efforts to stop this hotel.